



# House of Representatives

General Assembly

**File No. 22**

January Session, 2015

House Bill No. 6725

*House of Representatives, March 5, 2015*

The Committee on Children reported through REP. URBAN of the 43rd Dist., Chairperson of the Committee on the part of the House, that the bill ought to pass.

## ***AN ACT CONCERNING ANIMAL-ASSISTED THERAPY SERVICES.***

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly convened:

1 Section 1. Section 17a-22ee of the general statutes is repealed and the  
2 following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective from passage*):

3 (a) For purposes of this section: [.]

4 (1) "Animal-assisted activity" means any activity that involves a  
5 team consisting of a registered handler and therapy animal interacting  
6 with individuals within the state;

7 (2) ["animal-assisted therapy"] "Animal-assisted therapy" means  
8 goal-directed intervention in which [animals are] a team consisting of a  
9 registered handler and a therapy animal is used as an integral part of  
10 the [crisis] critical incident response process to aid individuals who  
11 have experienced mental, physical or emotional trauma;

12 (3) ["animal-assisted therapy community"] "Animal-assisted therapy

13 community" means the local or regional entities capable of engaging in  
14 animal-assisted activities or providing animal-assisted therapy to  
15 individuals within the state; [and]

16 (4) ["animal-assisted activity organization"] "Animal-assisted  
17 activity organization" means any entity involved in training,  
18 evaluating [and] or registering members of the animal-assisted therapy  
19 community; [.]

20 (5) "Animal-assisted critical incident response team" means a team  
21 of registered handlers and therapy animals that have been (A) trained,  
22 evaluated and registered by an animal-assisted activity organization,  
23 and (B) mobilized by the Department of Children and Families to  
24 engage in animal-assisted activities or provide animal-assisted  
25 therapy;

26 (6) "Registered handler" means an individual who has been  
27 screened, trained and registered by a national animal therapy  
28 organization such as Pet Partners, Therapy Dogs International or a  
29 similar organization, to engage in animal-assisted activities or provide  
30 animal-assisted therapy, or both; and

31 (7) "Therapy animal" means any animal trained to provide comfort  
32 to individuals who have (A) experienced mental, physical or emotional  
33 trauma, (B) witnessed, or have been a victim of, an act of violence, or  
34 (C) behavioral health care needs. "Therapy animal" does not include a  
35 "social comfort animal" providing visitation services to aged, infirm or  
36 chronically ill individuals or a "service animal" providing task-trained  
37 services to disabled individuals.

38 (b) Not later than January 1, [2014] 2016, the Commissioner of  
39 Children and Families shall, within available appropriations, develop  
40 and implement training for certain employees of the Department of  
41 Children and Families and mental health care providers on (1) the  
42 healing value of the human-animal bond for children, (2) the value of  
43 therapy animals in dealing with traumatic situations, and (3) the  
44 [benefit of an] benefits of animal-assisted activities and animal-assisted

45 therapy. [program.]

46 (c) Not later than January 1, [2014] 2016, the Commissioner of  
 47 Children and Families, in consultation with the Commissioner of  
 48 Agriculture and within available appropriations, shall [identify a  
 49 coordinated volunteer canine crisis response team. Such team shall  
 50 consist of various handlers and canines that have been trained,  
 51 evaluated and registered by an animal-assisted activity organization to  
 52 provide aid to individuals during and after traumatic events] develop  
 53 a protocol to identify and mobilize animal-assisted critical incident  
 54 response teams throughout the state. Such [team] teams shall operate  
 55 on a volunteer basis and shall be available to engage in animal-assisted  
 56 activities or to provide animal-assisted therapy, or both, within  
 57 twenty-four hours of receiving notice to do so.

58 (d) Not later than July 1, [2014] 2016, the Commissioner of Children  
 59 and Families, in consultation with [the Governor's Prevention  
 60 Partnership and] the animal-assisted therapy community, shall, within  
 61 available appropriations, develop [a crisis response program utilizing  
 62 the services of the coordinated volunteer canine crisis response team  
 63 identified pursuant to subsection (c) of this section to provide] a  
 64 protocol to utilize animal-assisted activities and animal-assisted  
 65 therapy to provide aid to children and youths living with trauma and  
 66 loss. Such services shall meet all licensing requirements required by  
 67 the state, and, at a minimum, be directly supervised by a mental health  
 68 professional, as defined in section 10-76t.

This act shall take effect as follows and shall amend the following sections:

Section 1	<i>from passage</i>	17a-22ee
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**KID**      *Joint Favorable*

The following Fiscal Impact Statement and Bill Analysis are prepared for the benefit of the members of the General Assembly, solely for purposes of information, summarization and explanation and do not represent the intent of the General Assembly or either chamber thereof for any purpose. In general, fiscal impacts are based upon a variety of informational sources, including the analyst's professional knowledge. Whenever applicable, agency data is consulted as part of the analysis, however final products do not necessarily reflect an assessment from any specific department.

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***OFA Fiscal Note***

***State Impact:*** None

***Municipal Impact:*** None

***Explanation***

There is no fiscal impact to the Department of Children and Families (DCF) to develop protocols to: (1) identify and mobilize animal-assisted (AA) critical incident response teams, and (2) use AA activities and therapy to provide aid to children and youth "living with trauma and loss." The agency is not required to implement these protocols. Further, there is no fiscal impact from extending, from 1/1/14 to 1/1/16, a provision requiring DCF to train "certain" agency employees and mental health care providers on the value of the human-animal bond among other topics.

***The Out Years***

***State Impact:*** None

***Municipal Impact:*** None

**OLR Bill Analysis****HB 6725*****AN ACT CONCERNING ANIMAL-ASSISTED THERAPY SERVICES.*****SUMMARY:**

This bill makes several changes in the law concerning animal-assisted therapy services.

The bill eliminates requirements in current law that the children and families (DCF) commissioner, in consultation with (1) the agriculture commissioner and within available appropriations, identify a coordinated volunteer canine crisis response team and (2) the Governor's Prevention Partnership and the animal-assisted therapy community, develop a crisis response program using the services of the crisis response team. It instead requires the DCF commissioner, in consultation with the agriculture commissioner and within available appropriations, to develop by January 1, 2016 a protocol to identify and mobilize animal-assisted critical incident response teams statewide. The teams must operate on a volunteer basis and be available to engage in animal-assisted activities, provide animal-assisted therapy, or both, within 24 hours of receiving notice to do so. (Neither the bill nor the underlying law specifies who must provide the notice.)

The bill also requires the DCF commissioner, in consultation with the animal-assisted therapy community and within available appropriations, to develop by July 1, 2016 a protocol to use animal-assisted activities and animal-assisted therapy to provide aid to children and youths living with trauma and loss. The services must meet all state licensing requirements and, at a minimum, be directly supervised by a mental health professional (i.e., a guidance counselor; school social worker, psychologist, or nurse; or child mental health

specialist in a community mental health center or child guidance clinic.)

Additionally, the bill extends, from January 1, 2014 to January 1, 2016, a requirement that the DCF commissioner develop and implement training for certain department employees and healthcare providers on the (1) healing value of the human-animal bond for children, (2) value of therapy animals in dealing with traumatic situations, and (3) benefits of animal-assisted activities and animal-assisted therapy (rather than the benefits of an animal-assisted therapy program, as required by current law.)

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage

### **DEFINITIONS**

The bill defines:

1. “animal-assisted activity” as any activity that involves a team consisting of a registered handler and therapy animal interacting with people in Connecticut;
2. “animal-assisted critical incident response team” as a team of registered handlers and therapy animals that have been (1) trained, evaluated, and registered by an animal-assisted activity organization and (2) mobilized by DCF to engage in animal-assisted activities or provide animal-assisted therapy;
3. a “registered handler” as a person screened, trained, and registered by a national animal therapy organization, such as Pet Partners, Therapy Dogs International, or a similar organization, to engage in animal-assisted activities, provide animal-assisted therapy, or both; and
4. a “therapy animal” as any animal trained to comfort people who have (a) experienced mental, physical, or emotional trauma; (b) witnessed, or been a victim of, a violent act; or (c) behavioral health care needs. Therapy animals do not include (a) “social

comfort animals” that provide visitation services to aged, infirm, or chronically ill people or (b) “service animals” providing task-trained services to people with disabilities.

The law currently defines “animal-assisted therapy community” as the local or regional entities capable of providing animal-assisted therapy to people in Connecticut. The bill broadens the definition to include local or regional entities capable of engaging in animal-assisted activities.

The law also currently defines “animal-assisted activity organization” as any entity involved in training, evaluating, and registering members for the animal-assisted therapy community. The bill broadens the definition to include entities involved in any one of those activities.

The bill also makes minor, technical, and conforming changes to the definition of “animal-assisted therapy.”

### **COMMITTEE ACTION**

Committee on Children

Joint Favorable

Yea 13      Nay 0      (02/19/2015)